

## Ontario rejects extension for probe into LTC homes after commission blames province for 'significant delays'

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A person looks out of a window at the Tendercare Living Centre, a long-term seniors care facility which is the site of a COVID-19 outbreak, in Scarborough, Ontario, Dec. 28, 2020.

CARLOS OSORIO/REUTERS

An independent commission examining the devastating impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Ontario's long-term care homes says it continues to face "significant delays" from the provincial government in obtaining information central to its investigation.

The commission has sought an eight-month extension to complete its work, and says delivering a final report by a proposed deadline of Dec. 31, 2021, will "require the province's full co-operation," according to correspondence posted on its website on Monday.

But the provincial government has rejected the commission's request for more time, cutting short its inquiry amid an escalating crisis.

"The urgency of our situation has not changed," Long-Term Care Minister Merrilee Fullerton says in a letter dated Dec. 23 to the three-member commission led by associate chief justice Frank Marrocco. "In fact, as Ontario deals with this next wave of COVID-19 throughout the province, the duration of which is unknown, the need for timely and focused advice is even more acute."

The government reported on Monday that a record 219 long-term care homes in Ontario have active outbreaks of COVID-19, accounting for 35 per cent of the sector. Since the onset of the pandemic, 2,795 nursing-home residents in the province have died of the virus.

### **TOP 15 HARDEST-HIT LONG-TERM CARE HOMES IN ONTARIO DURING THE SECOND WAVE OF THE VIRUS**

Deaths between mid-Sept. 2020 and Jan. 3, 2021

<b>Long-term care home</b>	<b>Deaths</b>
Tendercare Living Centre, Scarborough	52*
Westside, Etobicoke	41
Kennedy Lodge, Scarborough	39
Grace Villa Nursing Home, Hamilton	38
Sunnycrest Nursing Home, Whitby	34
Tyndall Nursing Home,	34

**Mississauga**

Oakwood Park Lodge, Niagara Falls	28
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Craiglee Nursing Home, Scarborough	26
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Extendicare Laurier Manor, Ottawa	26
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Extendicare Starwood, Ottawa	26
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The Village at St. Clair, Windsor	24
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Faith Manor Nursing Home, Brampton	23
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Hawthorn Woods Care Community, Brampton	23
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Rockcliffe Care Community, Scarborough	23
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Thorntonview, Ottawa	23
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\*While the Ontario Ministry of Long-Term Care released the figure of 52 on Monday, North York General Hospital, which took over management of Tendercare on Dec. 23, said 64 residents have died as of Jan. 4.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: ONTARIO MINISTRY OF LONG-TERM CARE

Medical experts, labour leaders representing health care workers, lawyers who advocate for the elderly and opposition members at the provincial legislature all said on Monday that it makes no sense to shut down the commissioners' work while the province is in the middle of a massive wave of the virus.

"The extension should have been granted," said Nathan Stall, a geriatrician at Toronto's Sinai Health System. "We need a robust postmortem on the long-term care sector that should capture both the first and the second wave."

Jane Meadus, a lawyer with the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly in Toronto, said forcing the commission to submit a final report by the original deadline of April 30 will deprive many people, including family members who have lost loved ones, of an opportunity to testify at the inquiry.

"If [the commissioners] have to start writing their report and they can't continue listening to people and doing their research and looking at what happened in the second wave, we're just not going to learn enough," Ms. Meadus said. "You don't stop that in the middle because an arbitrary date has been chosen."

In their letter dated Dec. 9 to Ms. Fullerton, the commissioners say they will not have completed their investigation in time to deliver a report by April 30. "Notwithstanding the work to date, the Commission continues to encounter significant delays in obtaining government information central to the Commission's investigation," the letter says. "Most documents responsive to the Commission's document summonses and requests remain outstanding."

The commissioners say they require additional information from the government about measures taken to prevent, isolate and contain the spread of COVID-19 in the province's long-term care homes, both before and during the second wave.

Ms. Fullerton said on Monday that she will ensure that the commissioners receive the documents they require.

A Globe and Mail review of the two dozen nursing homes hit hardest in recent weeks reveals that 21 are owned by for-profit companies – a trend also prevalent during the spring. The nine homes with the highest death tolls, including No. 1-ranked Tendercare Living Centre in Scarborough, are all older facilities with multibed ward rooms.

Sixty-four residents of Tendercare have died of the virus as of Monday, according to an update from North York General Hospital, which took over management of the home on Dec. 23.

Reed Zhao's 96-year-old grandmother, Ping Qiu, succumbed to the virus on Sunday morning. "She is in the arms of God," Mr. Zhao said in an e-mail to The Globe. "There is no pain and sickness." His grief is mixed with anger over a lack of information from officials at Tendercare about the outbreak, which started on Dec. 8.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said the commissioners should be given all the time they need to complete their work. She accused the government of "protecting the for-profit interests who make millions from this broken system at the expense of protecting seniors."

Sharleen Stewart, president of SEIU Healthcare, a union that represents personal support workers in long-term care, said the government has failed to protect the thousands of seniors who have died in long-term care homes as Premier Doug Ford promised it would.

“It’s clear Premier Ford’s ‘iron ring’ promise was a lie,” she said.

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